BASIC LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

A GUIDE TO JUMPSTART YOUR JOURNEY IN STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY.

WRITTEN BY DANIEL NORTON IN COLLABORATION WITH ADORAMA
This classic setup is great for flattering portraits and commercial type images. A large umbrella (at least 36”) creates a beautifully soft and diffused key light while two umbrellas give a nice even exposure across the background. Make sure to check the exposure and ensure the background is completely white (typically 1-2 stops over exposed).
This is one of the most commonly used lighting styles for catalog images. A large octagon (5 ft.+) to one side gives nice “wrap around” light that needs just a little fill from a large white reflector. The background is evenly illuminated by bouncing flash into large white V-Flats which also act as flags to keep the background light from spilling forward onto your subject.
This lighting scenario is used in editorial fashion or to make interesting portraits. A medium sized octagon softbox (usually 3’) is fitted with a grid. The distance from the subject to background and the angle of light create a moody dark grey background out of the white paper.
In this set-up, a beauty dish fitted with a grid is used to shape the subject’s face while a large umbrella behind the camera position offers a soft on-axis fill. V-Flats are used to bounce strobe light onto the background while keeping it off the subject.
ATHLETIC

This set-up produces soft but contrasty light which highlights the strength of your subject. A softbox as the key light from one side, filled in with a grid and a silver reflector for fill shapes the subject’s face while two strip boxes with grids showcase the shape & form of your subject. The background lights are warmed with a CTO gel to give both light and color contrast.

1. KEY LIGHT
SOFTBOX WITH GRID
2. FILL LIGHT
SILVER REFLECTOR
3. BACKGROUND LIGHT
STRIPBOX WITH GRID + WARMING GEL
GROUP

As much as we love to create shape and form in portraits, when making a group shot; soft, even light is the goal. Umbrellas will evenly light the background and 3 umbrellas in the front are used as a key. The center umbrella should be larger than the others as it will be further away. For instance, two 36” umbrellas with a 48” umbrella in the center.
A great way to add drama to portraits is to use shadows. Split lighting will create mystery and using a separation light from the back will prevent the subject from just falling off completely into darkness.
THANKS FOR READING

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*ALL STUDIO DIAGRAMS WERE DESIGNED ON SYLIGHTS.COM